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Guide to the Chequamegon Nature Trail

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Chequamegon National Forest

Forest



Service

United States Department of Agriculture

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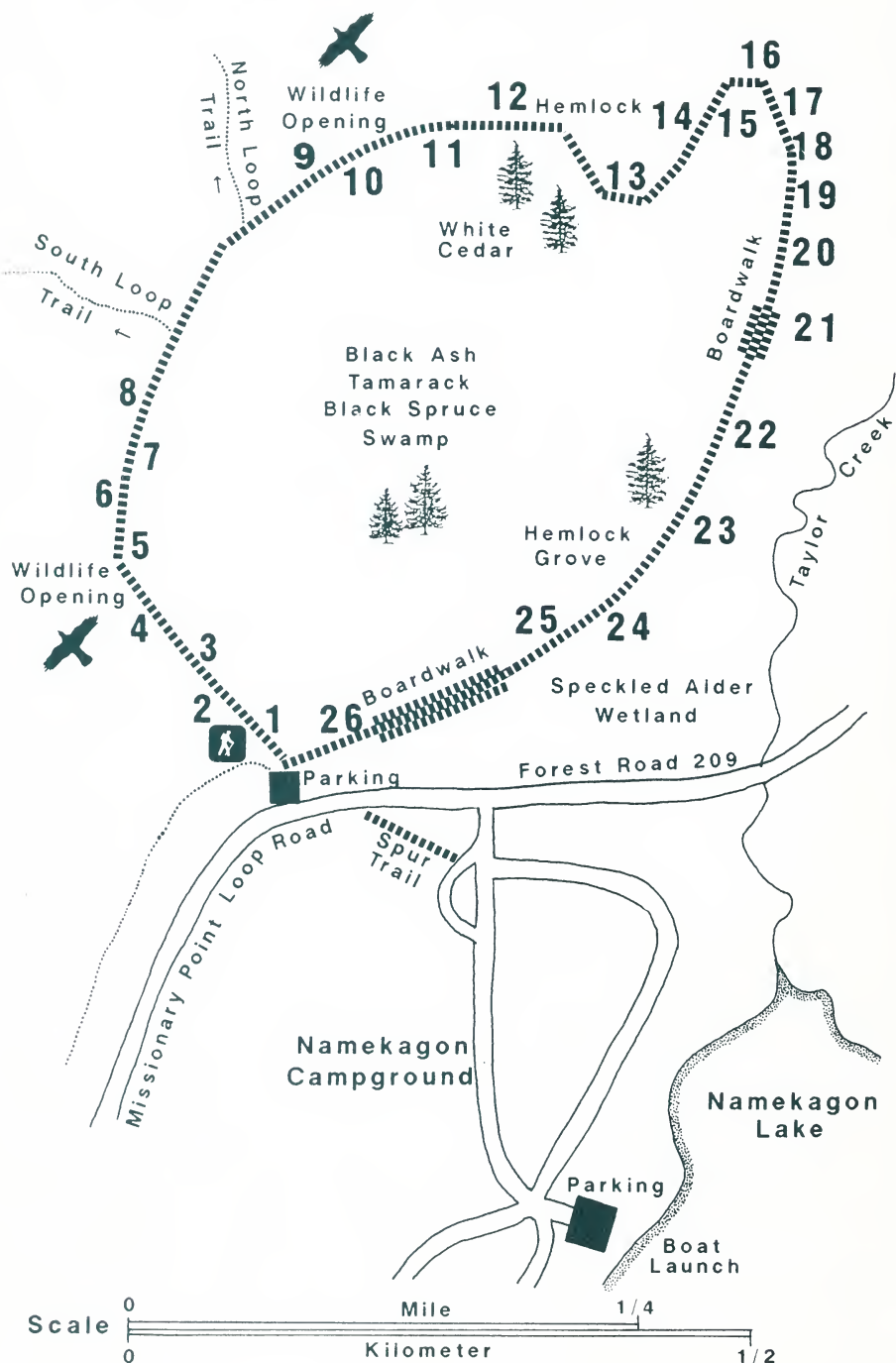
Welcome

A trip into solitude awaits you on the Namekagon Trail. This one-mile loop trail winds through upland broad-leaf forests to low wetlands. The biodiversity of this area is clearly evident as you listen to the many different birds call from the tree tops, or observe the footprints of animals that have been left in the soft earth. There are also a wide variety of plant and tree species in the area, including ferns, shrubs, mosses, white cedar, sugar maple, hemlock, and yellow birch.

This trail winds over gently rolling terrain. Plan on 45 minutes to complete this guided tour. Numbered posts along the trail correspond with points of interest described in this booklet. As you venture into the woods, you will find many varieties of wildlife including mosquitoes and flies. To make your visit to this area more enjoyable, plan on wearing bug repellent during the spring through fall seasons.



Namekagon Nature Trail



1 Extend Your Senses

As you walk this trail, you will experience the sights and sounds that make the northwoods a special place to visit! Listen to the song of nature...the soft rustle of the wind through the trees...the call of song birds as they dart overhead. Breathe in the rich scent of the earth...it permeates the air...awakening your senses. Look for drops of morning dew cast upon a spider's web...as it glistens like crystalline beads in the first rays of dawn.

The sweet smell of tender young shoots in early spring...lush plants, mosses, and shrubs blanket the forest floor in summer, and the splendor of autumn's color awaits your discovery. No matter what season you visit...the Forest reveals something new.



2 Putting the Spotlight on Wildlife

On the trail it is not unusual to spot wildlife; a white-tailed deer grazing quietly in one of the openings in the forest, a snowshoe hare dashing across the trail, or the many bird species that dwell in the area. There is also the exciting and unusual event of viewing a black bear as it feasts on wild berries.

You may also have fun being an investigator and searching for evidence of what might have passed your way. By looking for tracks, scats, bones, fur, feathers, borings in bark, tree cavities, or vegetation that has been used as a food source, you can discover a wealth of information.



3 Wildlife Viewing Etiquette

Viewing wildlife must be done with the least amount of disturbance to the animal. You would probably be surprised to know that some things that you do, though well meant, can harm the species. Every habitat provides animals with the energy they need to budget for reproduction, maintenance, and protecting themselves from predators. A frightened animal's heart beats faster and breathing becomes more intense, robbing an animal of energy it needs for other survival tactics.

Keeping your distance will make the animal feel more secure and will frighten it less. Be respectful of bird nests and animal dens. Parents may abandon the young or expend valuable energy to protect them.



4 Wildlife Openings

Wildlife openings occur naturally throughout the Forest, but this one was created by the Forest Service to provide a diverse environment for many species of wildlife. The white-tailed deer use the opening to graze, while the black bear use it to feast upon different types of berries that flourish at the woodland edge. The opening is also used by large birds of prey that perch in the tops of nearby trees and scout any prospective meal that may scurry into view.

This opening was planted with different types of vegetation which serve as food for different animals, such as Little Bluestem, Indiangrass, and wildflowers. You might want to keep a watchful eye out for upland plover and killdeer who hurry about this small grassland gathering seeds and insects. The killdeer's plaintive call may also be heard, "Killdee...Kill-deeah." There is also the woodcock who's main diet consists of eating their own weight in earthworms everyday! Look for feeding holes in the dirt about the size of a pencil.



5 Habitat: A Place Called Home

A habitat is a place where a species, whether it be plant or animal, can find a combination of water, food, shelter, hospitable climate, and room to roam. Over the span of evolutionary time, animals have become efficient in using the resources of their habitat. They developed special skills and behaviors to survive. They spend a majority of time in the habitat they specialize in...the one where they are most likely to live and regenerate.

A habitat has many different levels from the forest floor up to the highest branch. Below the forest floor woodchucks and moles burrow underground...moving up a layer to the forest floor shrews, mice, salamanders, and grouse patrol leaf litter for their next meal...moving even further up you'll find shrubs and berries which become a tasty meal for bears and deer...up to the top story of the Forest you'll find woodpeckers and nuthatches searching for insects within the trees, and pine martens chasing red squirrels.



6 Trees For Life

Trees serve as a vital function to the existence of life on earth. They are the foundation for a very complex community of plant and animal life that await your discovery. They provide us with fresh air to breathe, cool and cleanse the environment, a place to retreat for solitude, and also building materials necessary for our survival. Trees provide the basic fabric of existence for the intricate web of life within. Each plant and animal member of this community serves a specific function, interrelating with one another. This community is propelled by the dynamic forces of nature...birth, competition, and death.



7 Windows In The Canopy

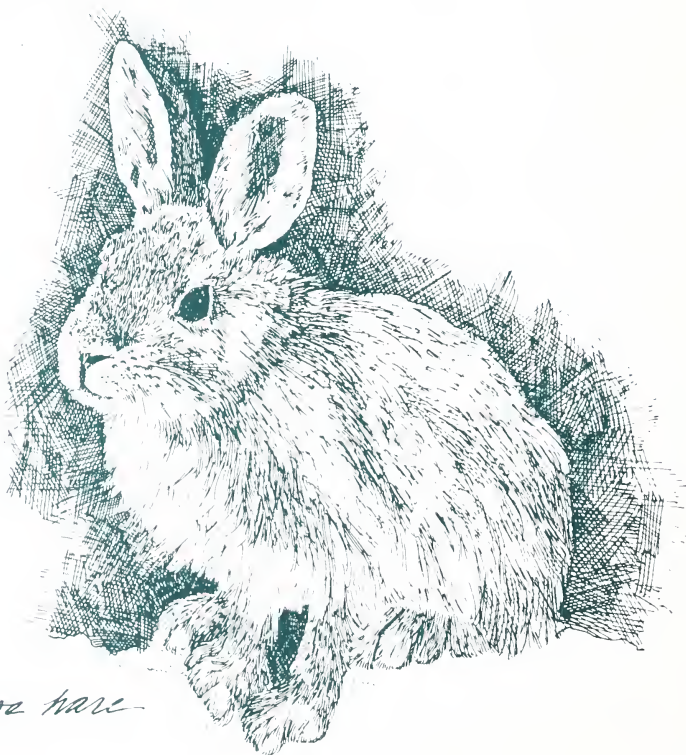
As a tree falls to the earth, it leaves behind a window in the forest canopy. This allows shafts of light to reach the forest floor. If allowed to succeed over time, this small opening will change from grasses and ferns, to low-growing brush, berry patches, and clumps of shrubs. These can be important feeding areas for snowshoe hares, fox, coyotes, and small birds.



8 Animal Adaptations

How would you survive the long cold winters? If you were a snowshoe hare, your thick fur would protect you from the harsh winter winds. Your tawny brown coat of summer would change to a winter white to conceal you from predators. The thick blanket of snow would serve as a platform to help you reach twigs and bark otherwise out of your reach. To pass the cold winter nights, you would snuggle under the snow-laden branches of the speckled alder shrub, shielding you from predators.

Each animal you may see along this trail has special adaptations to protect itself from seasonal changes or predators. Birds have the evolutionary gift of flight, bears sleep or hibernate in winter, and frogs burrow deep in the wetland mud to survive the winter cold. Many animals are camouflaged to blend in with their habitat. Ruffed grouse and woodcock, with leaf-like patterns on their feathers, hide easily on the forest floor.



Snowshoe hare

9 Birds Of A Feather... Stick Together!

Once a threatened species, the eastern bluebird has made an impressive return to the northwoods assisted by artificial nesting boxes like these. These boxes are placed together to take advantage of the natural guarding instincts. Tree swallows and bluebirds usually live side by side harmoniously, defending each others' nests and territories.

Watch for the bluebirds at the woodland edge as they perch on shrubs looking for caterpillars, grasshoppers, and beetles. Bluebirds have a characteristic red breast and, as Henry David Thoreau stated, "carries the sky on its back."



Bluebird

10 The Balance of Nature

In the natural world, life revolves around the cycle of birth, competition, and death. Each animal exists for a purpose...some being vegetarians and others preferring meat. The game of the hunter and the hunted is played out each day in the woods; some must die so that others may live. The snowshoe hare feeds upon the clover and is in turn pursued by the coyote, fox, and fisher. Mammals at the top of the food chain will eventually die, releasing their carbon to enrich the soil, which provides nutrients for shrubs, trees, and...clover.



fisher

11 Natural Climate Controls

Forests create their own climate internally by breathing out moisture and oxygen and cleansing the atmosphere of carbon dioxide. The forest community is thermostatically controlled under its thick canopy where temperatures rise more slowly during the day and retain more heat at night. Moisture levels are smoothed out, harsh winds are softened, and the animals who dwell within live in an evenly controlled environment...there are no air conditioners, dehumidifiers, or thermostats...it does it all naturally!



barred owl

12 Patterns of Nature

If you will look closely at this hemlock tree, notice the area riddled with holes. These holes were made by the yellow-bellied sapsucker. The sapsucker is the most quiet of all the woodpeckers and is easily overlooked if you are not intentionally searching for it.

The sapsucker gets its name from the habit it has of boring parallel holes in live trees and letting the sap run down the bark of the tree. The bird will suck up the sap and continually come back to feast upon the insects attracted to the sticky sap.

These holes can unfortunately harm the tree by providing an access point for fungus and other tree diseases.



*yellow-bellied
Sapsucker*

13 Basement Dwellers

Many animals make their home in the basement of the forest finding food and shelter among the leaves, soil, tree roots, rocks, and rotting logs. Beetles, earthworms, salamanders, and snails serve to vacuum the forest floor and cellar. Feasting on other insects, beetles forage between the leaf litter looking for their next meal. Look closely among the leaves and you may find a snail busy consuming the leaf litter. Search rock crevices, rotting logs, and stumps for the spotted salamander. This creature seeks moist, cool areas in search of insects, earthworms, snails, slugs, and spiders.



spotted salamander

14 Life From Death

Nature is an ever-turning circle that involves every living thing around us. We are all born, we live, and we die, then a new life begins. The same is true with this fallen tree. It lies here upon the ground where you can already see that vegetation is growing upon it such as mosses, mushrooms, lichens, and small ferns.

As this tree decays, it will give back vital nutrients to help fertilize the soil for future generations of plant and animal life, thus continuing this never-ending circle of life.



ruffed grouse

15 Tombstones of the Past

This enormous stump stands as a reminder of the logging era at the turn of the century. During this time, the forests were completely cleared leaving only acres of stumps to ever attest to their existence. When the logging era ended, fires raged out of control charring these remains of a once majestic forest.

Later, the forest began to renew itself and is now reaching maturity in this area. This stump is slowly decomposing and offers new life to future seedlings.



16 Animal Inns

Look closely high in this tree for an opening in the bark. This is a nesting cavity for animals that can climb or fly. These caverns provide safe havens to raise and nurture their young. A branch torn from the trunk of the tree will collect water and rot over time. A woodpecker stumbles upon this hollow and bores out a safe nesting niche to raise its young. Squirrels and other small birds, like nuthatches, will also use these nesting cavities.



*downy
woodpecker*

17 Pools of Life

These pools of still water fill and dry up every year, beginning with the spring thaw and the summer rains and then becoming more shallow through the fall and the onset of winter. Many forms of wildlife depend on these pools as a water source, breeding grounds, and as a stopover for migratory ducks.

In early spring, you will hear the song of the spring peeper, leopard, wood, and chorus frogs as they sing to attract mates. In the late spring, you can hear the American toad. In summer, you will hear the green, bull, and mink frogs. Laying their eggs in these pools to grow and evolve from tadpole to maturity, they then return to their own lake or pond. There are also salamanders, which frequent the pools needing to keep their skin moist and cool to survive.

The insect life that thrives on pools such as this draw a diverse crowd of hungry birds and small mammals who are looking for an easy meal.



18 Natural Pest Control

The pileated woodpecker is like a dentist for trees. These large, crow-sized birds drill into trees with their sharp bills in search of beetle larva and ants. Many people believe that the woodpecker is the cause of a tree's death, but in truth often the tree is already dead and if not, the woodpecker attempts to remove the insects within.

These birds chip away to carve great rectangular holes into the tree trunk. As they work, the ground below is showered with chips sometimes as large as a human hand. By breaking up these dead and dying trees, the pileated hastens the return of the tree to the soil.



*pileated
woodpecker*

19 Scouting Ridges

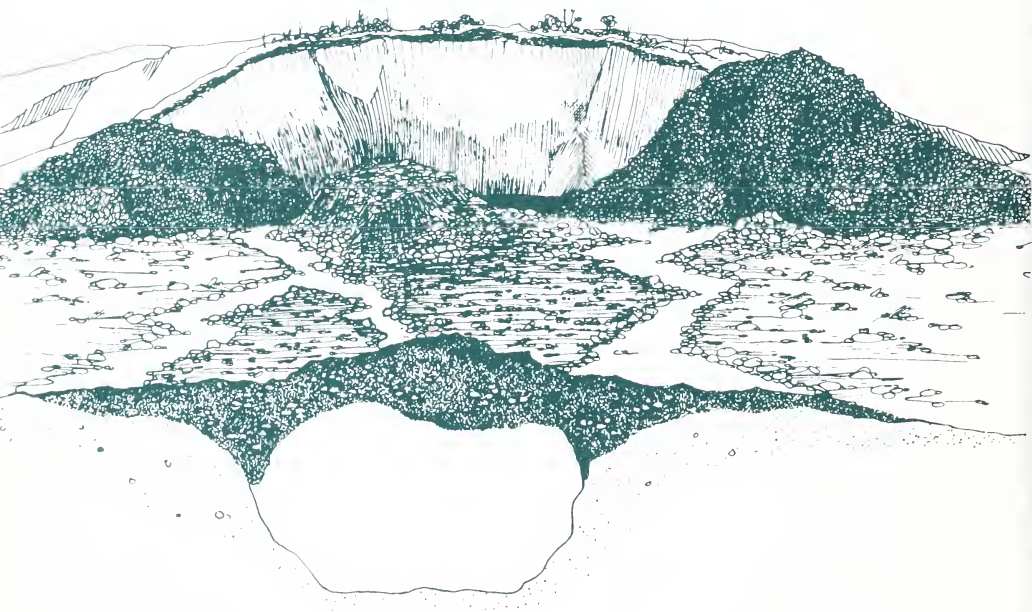
For animals that do not have the advantage of flight, high vantage points like this ridge are useful to scout out their next meal. Coyotes, fishers, fox, and weasels travel atop these highways looking below for unwary snowshoe hares, squirrels, mice, and shrews. Look closely at the soil for animal tracks crossing the trail.



20 Life in the Wake of a Glacier

The landscape you see today was once buried under a mile of glacial ice! This powerful force scratched, scoured, and polished hill tops, leaving behind a barren landscape. As the last glacier retreated about 10,000 years ago, plants began to colonize this area. Mosses and lichens scratched out a meager existence on the rocky surface left by the glacier, which eventually formed soil for grasses and shrubs.

The first hardy trees to inhabit this area were spruce and balsam fir. As the land continued to warm, aspen and birch, followed by maples and hemlocks, moved into the region. Today, the yellow birch, hemlocks, balsam fir, and maples thrive along this trail.



21 Taylor Creek

Specialized plants, like the sphagnum moss provided the foundation for these clumps of speckled alder to take root. These shrubs often invade low, rich wetlands like this, capitalizing on the decomposing plant and animal matter and the nutrients carried in by trickling streams.

Securely tucked beneath the tangled branches of the alders, birds such as the alder flycatcher make their home. Listen for its slurred call "Free-beer" as it skims over the tops of the alders, snatching insects.



*alder
flycatcher*

22 Pinnacles of Hemlock

This stand of towering hemlock is a part of what is called an upland mixed forest. These forests consist of sugar maple, yellow birch, and hemlock.

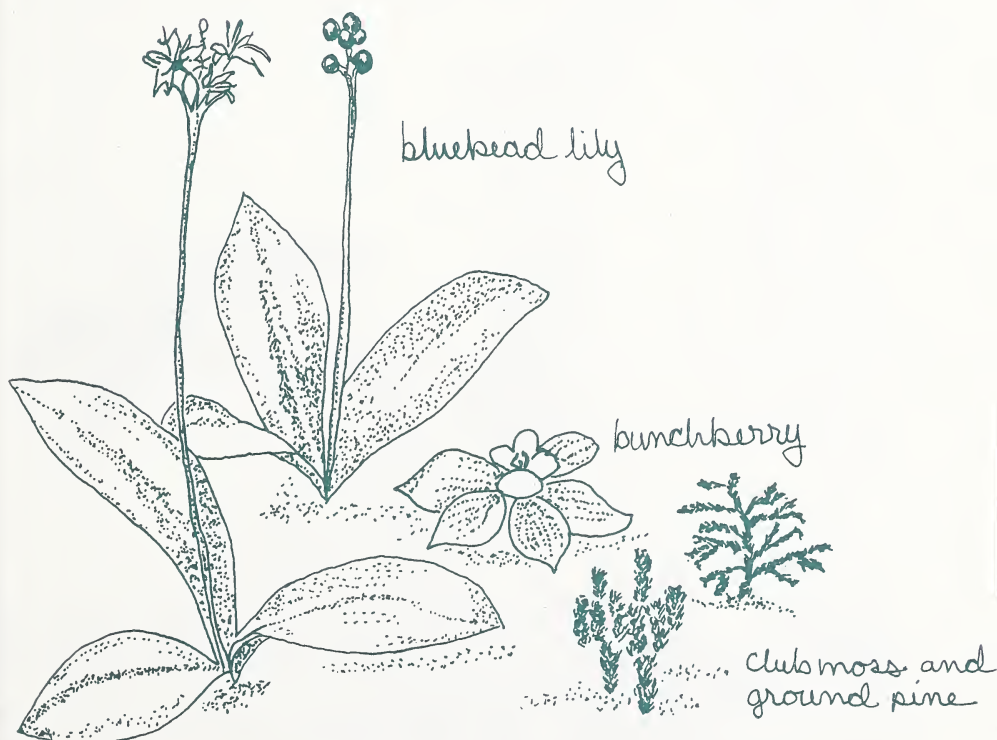
These forests are home to many types of wildlife such as hawks, solitary vireos, and black-throated green warblers. There are also fishers, red-backed salamanders, and white-tailed deer. At night the evening performance of the northern flying squirrels begins. They glide from branch to branch on their parachutes of fur in search of buds, nuts, and berry clusters.

All of these animals co-exist on different levels of the forest from the roots up to the highest pinnacles of these hemlock trees. These hemlocks provide animals with homes, a source of seeds, and protect them from the weather as the seasons change.



23 Something Shady

One of the determining factors of survival for vegetation is sunlight. In the shade of this forest canopy, certain plants have adapted to the life in the shadow of hemlock, balsam fir, and yellow birch. Bunchberry, bluebead lily, and club moss are at home on the forest floor.



24 Life in a Desert

The vegetation that thrives upon the forest floor can help you determine what type of soil is prominent in the area. Upon the forest floor you'll see starflowers, club moss, bunchberry, twin flowers, yellow root, and bluebead lily. These plants thrive in areas where the soil is rich, acidic, and well drained. If you look upward, you should see hemlock, yellow birch, and sugar maple. These trees grow well in this type of soil, and the needles of the hemlock serve to increase the acidic level of the soil. There are both mature hemlock and yellow birch in this stand of trees, but the hemlock dominates.



hemlock

*yellow
birch*



Sugar maple

25 Living the Bog Life

This bog is a slow reminder of our ever-changing world. Many of the bogs of the northwoods date as far back as 10,000 years ago, and were formed by receding ice.

Sedges and sphagnum moss took root around the shoreline, weaving an interlocking mat with their roots. Slowly the mat extended out over the surface, eventually swallowing the open water. As each generation of sphagnum moss dies, living mosses pile on top of the old. After thousands of years the mat became stable enough to support tamarack, black ash, and black spruce trees as you find here.

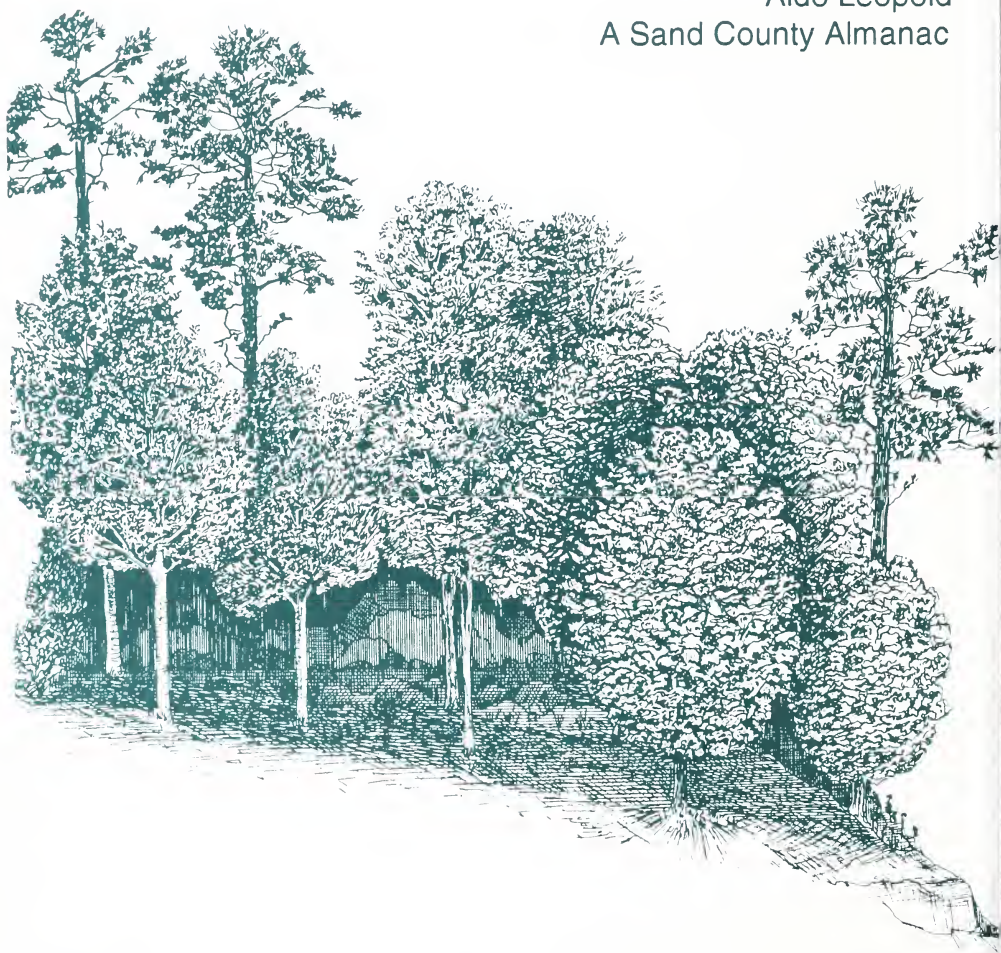
This bog is important as it absorbs flood waters, provides food and shelter for many kinds of wildlife, and filters the water entering Taylor Creek and Namekagon Lake.



26 The Land Pyramid

"Land, then is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals. Food chains are the living channels which conduct energy upward; death and decay return it to the soil. The circuit is not closed; some energy is dissipated in decay, some is added by absorption from the air, some is stored in soils, peats, and long-lived forests; but it is a sustained circuit, like a slowly augmented revolving fund of life."

Aldo Leopold
A Sand County Almanac





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Location Map



For More Information

For additional information about this area or other recreational opportunities in the Chequamegon National Forest, please write or visit:

Hayward Ranger District
USDA-Forest Service
Route 10, Box 508
Hayward, WI 54843

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FAX: (715) 634-3769

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